

"THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES"

Introduction

The book of Ecclesiastes has fascinated many people. Some feel it is the most puzzling book in the Old Testament. It has been called one of the most melancholy books of the Bible. It has been used by some to teach that man ceases to exist after death.

It is not a book that Christians should ignore. As with all Old Testament Scripture, it was written for our learning ([Ro 15:4](#)) and admonition ([1Co 10:11](#)). It is therefore profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness ([2Ti 3:16-17](#)).

The book has special relevance today in our materialistic society, for it helps us to see the vanity of many earthly pursuits. It contains lessons for all, but especially for the young who have so much to lose should they make the wrong choices early in life.

TITLE: In the Hebrew Bible, the book is called "**Qoheleth**" (Koheleth) which means "preacher" (cf. [1:1](#)). The term suggests one who speaks to an assembly. The translators of the Septuagint (a Greek version of the Old Testament) called it "**Ekklesiastes**", which also means "preacher". The word is derived from "ekklesia", meaning "assembly".

AUTHOR AND DATE OF WRITING: Jewish and early Christian tradition attribute the book to **Solomon**. The author identifies himself as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" ([1:1](#)). He also refers to himself as "the Preacher" ([1:1,2,12](#); [7:27](#); [12:8,9,10](#)). Internal evidences point to Solomon. Note the references to:

- * His wisdom - [1:16](#); cf. [1Ki 3:12](#)
- * His building activities - [2:4-6](#); cf. [1Ki 7:1-12](#)
- * His wealth - [2:7-9](#); cf. [2Ch 9:13-28](#)
- * His activities after writing this book - [12:9-10](#); cf. [1Ki 4:30-34](#)

Some question whether certain conditions described in the book (cf. [3:16](#); [4:13-16](#); [5:8](#)) existed during the reign of Solomon. But these conditions could have been noted by Solomon in neighboring countries, or in lower-level positions of his administration.

In my opinion, the evidence is simply not compelling to reject the traditional view of Solomon as the author. If Solomon is indeed the author, then the date the book was written would be around **945 B.C.**

PURPOSE FOR WRITING: The Preacher wondered what many have asked:
**"What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils
under the sun?" (1:3).**

In other words, what value or purpose is there for living? What is the meaning of life? Having been blessed with great material resources and wisdom, the Preacher was able to explore all avenues in his search. He writes to share with us the results of his own investigation, and to offer observations and words of counsel gleaned from his search.

MESSAGE: There are two main messages. The first is stated in the prologue:

"All is vanity" (1:2)

This theme is repeated by the Preacher time and again:

- * Prior to describing his search for meaning - **1:14**
- * Throughout the course of his search:
 - The vanity of pleasure - **2:1**
 - The vanity of industry (labor) - **2:11,22-23; 4:4**
 - The vanity of human wisdom - **2:15**
 - The vanity of all life - **2:17**
 - The vanity of leaving an inheritance - **2:18-21**
- * Throughout his words of counsel and wisdom:
 - The vanity of earthly existence - **3:19-21**
 - The vanity of acquiring riches over family - **4:7-8**
 - The vanity of political popularity - **4:16**
 - The vanity of many dreams and many words - **5:7**
 - The vanity of loving abundance - **5:10**
 - The vanity of wealth without the gift of God to enjoy it - **6:2**
 - The vanity of wandering desire - **6:9**
 - The vanity of foolish laughter - **7:6**
 - The vanity of injustice in this life - **8:14**
 - The vanity of the days of darkness - **11:8**
 - The vanity of childhood and youth - **11:10**
- * At the conclusion of the book - **12:8**

Indeed, the key word in this book is "**vanity**". It occurs 35 times in 29 verses. It means "futility, uselessness, nothingness." But a key phrase to be noted is "**under the sun**". It is found 29 times in 27 verses. It suggests that this message of vanity is true when one looks at life purely from an earthly perspective. Leave God and the afterlife out of the equation, and life is truly vanity!

Therefore another message in this book is the importance of serving God throughout life. This is the message the Preacher would leave with the young (cf. **11:9-12:1**), and is stated in his final words:

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (12:13)

Throughout the book, we will find what the Preacher later describes as "goads" and "nails" (cf. 12:11). These are wise sayings that will "prod" our thinking, and exhortations that will provide stability and direction for living. Ecclesiastes is certainly a book worthy of careful study!

BRIEF OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION AND PROLOGUE (1:1-3)

I. THE PREACHER'S SEARCH FOR MEANING IN LIFE (1:4-2:26)

II. THE PREACHER'S OBSERVATIONS FROM LIFE (3:1-6:12)

III. THE PREACHER'S COUNSEL FOR LIFE (7:1-12:7)

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION (12:8-14)

Questions:

1. What do you know about Solomon?
2. Please explain in your own words Solomon's statement in 1:2
3. What does the phrase 'under the sun' mean to you?
4. Solomon taught that increased wisdom and knowledge lead only to increased grief and pain (Eccl. 1:18) why do you think this is so?

Think about it!

Many Christians have difficulty focusing on things of God even though they know life is fading away. Do you live under the sun lusting after temporal things or live a God-centered life?